

January 1979

Review of Child Abuse and Neglect: Legislation,
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Gordon K. Nelson and Child Maltreatment in the
United States: A Challenge to Social Institutions by
Saad J. Nagi

Ruth-Arlene W. Howe

Boston College Law School, rutharlene.howe@bc.edu

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Recommended Citation

Ruth-Arlene W. Howe. "Review of Child Abuse and Neglect: Legislation, Reporting, and Prevention by Joseph J. Costa and Gordon K. Nelson and Child Maltreatment in the United States: A Challenge to Social Institutions by Saad J. Nagi." *Contemporary Sociology* 8, (1979): 97-98.

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Family and Intimate Lifestyles

Child Abuse and Neglect: Legislation, Reporting, and Prevention, by JOSEPH J. COSTA and GORDON K. NELSON. Lexington, Mass.: Heath, 1978. 417 pp. \$25.00 cloth.

Child Maltreatment in the United States: A Challenge to Social Institutions. by SAAD J. NAGI. New York: Columbia University Press, 1977. 162 pp. \$8.00 cloth.

RUTH-ARLENE W. HOWE
Boston College Law School

The shocking reality of child abuse and neglect occurring in every stratum of American society was documented during the decade of the 1960s. In spite of some fear that the widespread concern was merely another cyclical outburst, concern persisted into the seventies and entered the political agenda on the national level. The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (Pub. L. No. 93-247, enacted January 31, 1974; recently amended by the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment and Adoption Reform Act of 1978) committed the federal government to the establishment of a National Center of Child Abuse and Neglect, charged with responsibility for the prevention, identification, and treatment of child abuse and neglect.

Both of these works, responsive to the federal mandate, attempt to present important information sorely lacking prior to the 1974 federal law. *Child Maltreatment in the United States* reports the results of a national survey which, unlike other studies that view the abused or neglected child as a victim and/or the abusive or neglectful parent as the perpetrator, focused upon the organization of community services and control mechanisms concerned with identification, prevention, and control of child abuse and neglect.

Nagi's study is part of broader research into structures and performance of agencies administering human services, pursued for a number of years at Mershon Center, Ohio State University. His methodological approach included: (1) interviews with judges, physicians, human service providers, police and others frequently encountering child maltreatment; (2) observations of court proceedings, pediatric wards, and other facilities; and (3) a survey of

organizations and programs comprising the social, legal, educational, and health institutions most often involved with child maltreatment. A total of 1,696 interviews were completed, representing 96.4% of the respondents sought.

Nagi fully describes survey questions and responses and includes many illustrative tables. Important contextual issues and dilemmas are discussed:

. . . the rights of children and parents and the role of the state, the status of knowledge and technology in the field, incompatibilities between punitive and therapeutic approaches, conflicts within professional roles and problems arising from the protection of professional roles and professional domains. [p. 13]

Applying an epidemiological approach, Nagi compares estimates of the prevalence and incidence of child maltreatment. He concludes, however, that developments in a number of necessary elements such as clear definitions, thorough case identification, and plausible and verifiable conceptual frameworks or explanatory theories about child abuse are still too primitive.

Child Maltreatment primarily addresses social policy-makers and program developers—administrators, supervisors, and evaluators of institutional programs charged with responding to child abuse. While recommending some specific program components, the main thrust of Nagi's recommendations go to the need for greater coordination of services and programs both at the community level and in terms of the role of the federal government. He cautions against efforts to increase reporting as an end in itself rather than as a step toward the delivery of appropriate services and urges that greater attention be given to preventive measures.

In this reviewer's opinion, societally we are truly on the horns of a dilemma. There is no rush to apply currently available diagnostic understandings about parental capacity to nurture and to move to terminate the rights of an abusive parent to the custody and care of his/her child following a first confirmed report of abuse while the child is young and hopefully not irreversibly damaged, although it is an accepted part of our "common wisdom" that a damaged child grows up to be an abusive/neglectful parent and will perpetuate the cycle. As

Nagi notes, there are increasing numbers of unconfirmed reports. Mass media campaigns, along with the expanded reporting laws, have increased the numbers of reports, but not necessarily the accuracy of the reporting for identification purposes. The price for a cure may be higher than our societal values and priorities will permit.

In contrast, *Child Abuse and Neglect: Legislation, Reporting and Prevention* purports to address American and Canadian researchers and practitioners in the field of child abuse and neglect and to provide them with a tool to facilitate identification of a knowledge base that in the past has been uncertain. The authors have thus assembled a most comprehensive bibliography of 1,590 entries which they painstakingly categorize for easy reference.

Following an interesting foreword co-authored by a parent of Parents Anonymous, Inc. and Gordon Nelson, the authors review the literature and the range of explanations and definitions of child abuse and neglect. They present a model reporting act developed by the Early Childhood Task Force of the Education Commission of the States. Since this model act was only one of various statutes developed, it would have been helpful if the authors had referred to another model, such as that developed by Sussman and Cohen (1975) in *Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect: Guidelines for Legislation*.

The major portion of the Costa work is devoted to presenting reporting law requirements for each jurisdiction in the United States and in Canada. Programs, agencies, and the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of key personnel are listed. Brief descriptions are given of the organizational structures of the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare and the Canadian Department of National Health and Welfare. However, a major drawback is the absence of any clear reference to the date of compilation of the materials. The description of HEW does not reflect the reorganization undertaken in 1977, nor are the listings of state and local personnel presently accurate. The authors are to be commended for their overall efforts in bringing together in one volume the amount of data that they present. The volume's price may limit its acquisition to reference libraries, but those who are fortun-

nate enough to have access to it may find it a useful aid.

Fragile Families, Troubled Children: The Aftermath of Infant Trauma, by ELIZABETH ELMER. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1978. 160 pp. \$7.95 cloth.

JACK F. KINTON

Social Science Services and Resources

The interior of the family, parent-child interaction, and parental stress are especially important areas of sociological concern. Child abuse is a "now" area of the current mental health movement, legislative action, and sociological investigation.

Elizabeth Elmer's *Fragile Families, Troubled Children: The Aftermath of Infant Trauma* is the twenty-third book in the University of Pittsburgh's contemporary community health series funded by the Falk Medical Fund. This work follows her 1967 book *Children in Jeopardy: A Study of Abused Miners and Their Families* which, along with Helfer and Kepe's *The Battered Child*, set the stage for federal action on child abuse detection.

Elmer's study is limited by using only hospital-treated abused children in one metropolitan area and her sample size is small. Its sophistication is in the extensive use of psychoanalytical techniques in the study of abused urban children of all races. An excellent appendix provides scales and questionnaires for further studies of limited or repressed child development within the American family. This work could serve as a benchmark for larger studies of detection and treatment alternatives for parents and children in child abuse situations.

Beyond the Nuclear Family Model: Cross-Cultural Perspectives, edited by LUIS LENERO-OTERO. Beverly Hills: Sage, 1977. 226 pp. NPL, paper.

J. ROSS ESHLEMAN
Wayne State University

During the past few years, family sociologists, historians, and others have focused a considerable amount of attention on the